

LOMA LINDA - Diane Woods, a researcher and founder of the African American Health Institute, has been appointed to the California Council on Multicultural Health.

The council consists of 24 members from disparate backgrounds, including black, Pacific Islander, Latino, American Indian and Asian health experts from throughout the state.

Woods, of Loma Linda, said the group will work together to make recommendations to the state Department of Health. They have some common interests as well as unique needs, she said.

"These are minorities that are underrepresented and underserved - generally not included in leadership positions in reference to health or other areas," she said. "We have many commonalities of that nature."

There are also differences. Woods said black people in the U.S. have the poorest outcomes for preventable health conditions of any group. That's an issue she'll pursue in her new post, she said.

Woods, 56, has a doctorate in public health with a specialty in health promotion and education. She works as an assistant research professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Education at Loma Linda University.

Her 35-year career has taken her across the country - learning, practicing and teaching public health. She said she observed health disparities according to race, and, inspired by her faith, she made righting those wrongs her calling.

One of Woods' most ambitious achievements was creating the African American Health Institute, which focuses on improving the health and health care of black populations in San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Terri Thorfinnson, acting chief of the state Office of Multicultural Health, said she was looking for variety not only of ethnicities but also of expertise. She wanted researchers, health-care providers and policy advocates on the council, she said.

"The reason Dr. Woods stood out is because she has both experience in health-care provision and is a leader in terms of research," Thorfinnson said.

James Kyle, vice president of strategic development at Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles, knew Woods from his tenure as dean of the Loma Linda University School of Public Health.

He praised Woods as "an outstanding scholar, very committed to the community."

"I admire her ability to work with diverse constituents and pull those together," he said. "She did a wonderful job in consensus building, in pulling (the health institute) together."

Woods hopes to do the same in the state council.

"We'll be bringing together ethnic minority groups in a unified effort to address the health disparity issues among cultural groups," she said. "I'm really, really excited about the work."